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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000123

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KAZAKH CIO TRIP TO BAKU AND YEREVAN "ONLY FOR FAMILIARIZATION"

Classified By: a/dcm terry davidson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Kazakhstan's Embassy eagerly denied to Poloff that FM Kanat Saudabayev, visiting Baku February 14-15 as OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CIO), brought any new proposals with him relating to Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), contrary to local media reporting. The Embassy emphasized that the Minister's trip to Baku, Yerevan and Tbilisi was for "familiarization only." Saudabayev will try to use President Nazarbayev's personal familiarity with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Astana's historically good relations with both, to influence the process positively. However, Kazakhstan's representatives here hold out little hope that the problem will be resolved under their country's chairmanship. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Poloff met on February 22 with Kazakhstani Embassy political counselor Dastan Suleymenov to discuss Saudabayev's February 14-15 visit, which included private meetings with President Aliyev, the Foreign Minister, and parliamentary and political party leaders. Local media speculated intensely on the content of the message Saudabayev was said to have brought from Kazakhstani President Nazarbayev regarding NK, predicting a fresh Kazakhstani initiative to replace the Minsk Group process. Suleymenov called the speculation "groundless" and typical of the Azerbaijani media, whose factual reporting had improved little since his previous assignment in Baku in 2003-4. In fact, Saudabayev brought nothing concrete with him and intended the trip only as a familiarization tour of the conflict issues in the South Caucasus.

¶3. (C) The CIO's role will likely be to seek opportunities to exploit the influence of President Nazarbayev, and what Astana regards as the excellent relations it has with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, although Suleymenov did not know of any immediate plans to engage. (Comment: We would expect very little coordination of this kind of effort to take place in Baku. Suleymenov, echoing comments from many of our counterparts, described working relations with the Azerbaijani MFA as "terrible," noting that even simple substantive responses take 3-4 months to obtain. End note.) In a separate February 12 meeting with Charge and Pol-Econ Counselor, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, the Personal Representative of the CIO responsible for managing the Minsk Group, said that he expected Saudabayev to attempt to play a role in the negotiations (unusual for a CIO), and that he had discouraged him from doing so.

¶4. (C) Comment: Suleymenov and another colleague present were privately pessimistic about the possibilities for a

breakthrough during the Kazakhstani term in office. Both diplomats also expressed support for Turkey-Armenia normalization, but saw it as complicating NK in the current situation. Both were clearly sympathetic to the Azerbaijanis' international law arguments in support of its sovereignty over the region. At times their commentary clearly veered into personal views, but a number of factors including cultural commonalities; economic linkages, especially in the energy sphere; and Kazakhstani sensitivity to the problems of ex-Soviet republics that inherited potentially unstable ethnic and territorial issues might tend to tilt their country's policy toward greater sympathy for Baku. In a surprising side comment, Suleymenov, in response to Poloff's question, said that the quantity and vociferousness of aggressive propaganda in Azerbaijan was significantly less than during his first assignment here five years ago, when it was "unbelievable."

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